

CENTRAL AMERICA BROKAW: But the most dramatic political story of the day was in Washington, where the Reagan administration was forced to defend its Central American policy as a result of the controversy surrounding the placing of mines in Nicaraguan ports with CIA assistance. Sen. Barry Goldwater wrote a blistering criticism of the way the situation was handled, and President's Reagan spokesman was forced to issue a statement calling the debate about the mines shrill and confusing. The statement said, as well, that the administration has no plans to invade any Central American country; no plans for any American military enterprise after the American elections this fall. At the same time, however, no more mines will be placed in those Nicaraguan ports with American assistance, for now, at least. We have two reports on this controversy tonight; Marvin Kalb with the policy decisions; Bob Abernathy with the Congressional reaction. First, Kalb.

KALB: Informed officials say the controversial mine laying operation has been ended for the time being. But sources caution it could start again. One official explaining, it was always intended to be of limited duration. The large CIA ship that has been supervising the operation has reportedly left the scene. But the mines that have not yet exploded, are still in Nicaraguan ports, hampering international shipping in and out. In a clear effort to shift the popular focus from the mining to the Marxists, officials now claim that the rebel forces in El Salvador are benefitting from what one called a continuing and substantial flow of military supplies from Nicaragua. A prelude, apparently, to a new rebel offensive, perhaps by September to exploit the pressures of a presidential campaign. JOHN HUGHES (State Dept. Spokesman): There may well be some plans on their part to respond militarily. Officials say it was Secretary of State Shultz who recommended to the White House that the U.S. declare in advance that the World Court has no jurisdiction over the mining of Nicaraguan ports, a policy that has clearly backfired. The U.S. has no international support, even from its closest allies. And an aroused Congress may now cut off funds for all covert operations against Nicaragua. Officials are embarrassed and defensive about the mining and the World Court decisions, aware that once again, there is an impression that the administration cannot run an effective foreign policy. Marvin Kalb, NBC News, the State Department.

ABERNATHY: Congress is in revolt over the CIA's mining of Nicaraguan harbors. Members describe the mood as angry and incredulous. Sen. Barry Goldwater, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee sent a blistering letter to

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CIA Director William Casey, calling the mining, 'An act violating international law. It is an act of war. For the life of me, I don't see how we're going to explain it.' Other Senators, equally angry. SEN. PAUL SARBANES (D-Md.): Obviously, we're in violation of international law. SEN. PATRICK LEAHY (D-Vt.): The administration just can't blunder into one stupid mistake after another in foreign policy without realizing at some point the Congress is going to find the courage to stop them.

ABERNATHY: CIA Director Casey spent the afternoon trying to reassure Senators about the mining. But he was said to have been unconvincing. Meanwhile, in the House, more outrage. REP. TED WEISS (D-N.Y.): Whether Ronald Reagan is capable of accepting it or not, state-sponsored terrorism is as reprehensible, whether committed by us or by the Russians. REP. DAVID BONIOR (D-Mich.): And I urge the House to stand by its convictions and reject any funds for a policy that is branding this nation as an international outlaw. REP. BARBARA BOXER (D-Calif.): I am appalled and ashamed of our cowardly behavior, waging a secret war, endangering lives at sea, refusing to stand up to world scrutiny.

ABERNATHY: Last week President Reagan asked Congress not to criticize his foreign policy once it was in effect. The reaction here to the Nicaraguan mining suggests no chance, if there ever was one, that the president will get his wish. Bob Abernathy, NBC News, at the U.S. Capitol.